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Gay Hollywood

Hudson's death from AIDS not expected to bring homosexual stars out of closet

By Sally Ogle Davis

Of all the reputedly gay actors in Hollywood, none, apparently, lived a more agonizing double life than Rock Hudson. A quiet, shy man, he seemingly became so used to masking his true feelings and identity that he was often painful to interview. Even when asked innocuous questions, he would avoid straight answers. Always affable, it was as if he couldn't afford an opinion on anything because it might betray some tiny part of who he really was.

It was ironic that in his final illness and death from AIDS, it was the gaunt, wasted Hudson whose picture was splashed on front pages around the world. The private life of this most private man suddenly became public property. Only approaching the inevitability of death did it seem that he could bring himself to be himself — and that has been the dilemma of every gay actor in filmtown since movies began.

While the film capital genuinely mourns for Hudson and prepares a barrage of "AIDS as the Disease of the Month" programs — movies of the week, medical series from "Trapper John, M.D." to "St. Elsewhere" — cynics in Hollywood wonder if any of it will make any difference. If Hudson, by some miracle, had made a dramatic recovery, for instance, could he ever have gone back to playing love scenes? Would his coming clean have made it easier for gay leading men to step out of the closet and reveal to their fans that their heterosexual lovemaking is strictly for the camera?

While Elizabeth Taylor, Burt Reynolds, Linda Evans, Shirley MacLaine, Cher and a host of other Hollywood luminaires are committed to raising millions for Hudson's Beverly Hills-based AIDS Research Foundation, did Hudson's latter-day frankness do more to encourage gay actors to be more open about their lifestyle? The truth is that most homosexual actors will continue to guard their secret to the grave.

In 1976, openly gay San Francisco author Armistead Maupin says he urged Hudson to come out of the closet. "I felt he was a true American success story and that his visibility as a gay person would mean a lot toward clearing up the misconceptions the American public had about homosexuality," he said in a published interview. "He seemed kind of fascinated and horrified at the same time. I wanted him to do it because he was a big hero to me and I thought he would be a big hero to a lot of other people."

Hollywood writer Bruce Villanche, who scripted the celebrity AIDS benefit in Beverly Hills last month and writes for everyone from Bette Midler to the Osmonds, thinks Hudson's death will not bring gay actors out of the closet.

"It's the age-old problem of actors concealing their gayness and it won't change," he says. "As long as Hollywood is selling a product dependent on women, caprice and artifice, nothing can be different. It's just too hard to maintain an illusion when you know the reality."

When a handsome actor takes a Linda Evans or Victoria Principal in his arms on prime-time television before 40 million viewers, nobody wants to know he's gay. And so the charade continues, often with the tacit compliance of the media.

The supermarket weeklies continue to pair a handsome actor, who specializes in prestige miniseries, with a succession of new loves, even though they and everyone in Hollywood knows he's gay. And while a TV-star-turned-movie-box-office-idol talks of his passion for an old girlfriend, the studio promotes his well-honed pectorals to prove his masculinity.

Whole institutions have sprouted around the deception. In filmtown, the handsome homosexual actor serves a useful social purpose: to escort aging movie queens to premieres or parties. It's all a big game.

Of course there are always rumors and, ironically, Hudson came in for more than most. Perhaps it was because of his rugged, 6-foot 4-inch all-American image that seemed so at odds with the quiet man who frequented San Francisco gay bars in off-hours.

Periodically, another bizarre Hudson story would surface — he'd allegedly "married" TV actor Jim Nabors in a secret wedding, or he'd been having a torrid affair with singer-composer Rod McKuen. Through it all, Hudson maintained a quiet dignity protected loyal friends — gays and straights alike — who knew him as kind and gentle.

Little has changed for gay actors, however, since the time of Rudolf Valentino. Stars like Ramon Novarro (who met a brutal death after he had picked up two young homosexual drifters) and celebrities like Charles Laughton, Montgomery Clift, James Dean, Sal Mineo, Tyrone Power and even Errol Flynn — who was rumored to be bisexual — have always concealed their sexual proclivities.

Gays in other professions can demand that they be treated in accordance with their talent, not their sexuality. But for Hollywood's leading man, his talent often is his ability to project his sexuality, and it had better be heterosexual.

Today Hollywood's gay community is a powerful and tightly knit one, and homophobia is less a force here than in any town in the United States. The head of one of the biggest dream factories is gay — powerful producers, directors, writers and politicians are homosexual and wield influence creatively and financially. They hire each other and they protect each other. But they can't stand up and be counted. They can't change the basic facts that while the public may accept a gay ballet dancer, it cannot accept a gay actor romancing the glamorous star of a soap.

The difference, says Barry Krost, producer and manager of such stars as Elizabeth Montgomery and Robert Foxworth, is "that one is a craft for a coterie audience, the other is sold to us as reality." Fear of disclosure stalks the corridors of the film factories every bit as much as in the bad old days when homosexuals could be blackmailed and worse to keep their secrets hidden.

Noted a well-known TV star who has concealed his sexual preference for years, "There's been a lot of breast-beating about Rock's terrible plight, and much talk of a new Hollywood honesty. But it's a bunch of garbage. How many name stars have come forward to blow their cover? Sure, the people who give us parts know our proclivities, but if I dared go public it would be the kiss of death. My pals in the business couldn't afford to gamble that Mr. and Mrs. Public would be able to separate my private life from my screen character. No way."

Inside the industry it's fairly common knowledge who is gay and who is straight. A few years ago, a Hollywood weekly paper even printed a list, which is why stories of panic and hysteria about AIDS are often exaggerated.

Says Krost, "I haven't seen anyone changing their party habits or their dinner lists. And if Hollywood people are kissing the air instead of each other, it's as it always was — to protect their makeup."

If actors in Hollywood are still scared to speak up and be counted, so, too, are producers, directors, studio heads and character actors — who don't even depend on a macho image for their livelihood.

Peter Scott, the gay activist and head of Hollywood's Project AIDS, notes, "I have a certain sympathy for the high-profile star. His ability to earn depends on the public buying his image. But I'm less sympathetic with the rest, who don't have so much to lose."

Krost disagrees. "Why should they stand up and talk about their sexuality? Would they be expected to do it if they worked for IBM?"

Meanwhile, Hollywood plans several projects on AIDS. In the NBC TV movie, "An Early Frost" (scheduled to air in November), Ben Gazzara and Gena Rowlands play parents of a young lawyer (Aidan Quinn from "Desperately Seeking Susan") who reveals that he suffers from AIDS. And another film in the works is about the Beverly Hills mother of twin sons, one of whom was given a tranfusion at birth and died of AIDS when he was 3.

After all the breast-beating and the flood of scripts on AIDS, will anything really change? Or will Hollywood simply close the book on the disease and start having meetings on the next trendy subject?

Hudson's public disclosure and death have probably hastened the day when a cure will be found. But in terms of changing the lives of stellar homosexuals in the film industry, it hasn't made an iota of difference.

Says Scott, "As long as the American public chooses to buy a fictitious image on the screen as reality, the double lives will continue."

— NYT Special Features/Syndication Sales

Rumors of homosexuality have shadowed actors. Errol Flynn, left, in a scene from the 1938 film 'The Adventures of Robin Hood,' was thought to be bisexual. Other stars, such as Montgomery Clift, below, concealed their sexual proclivities.

MS benefit to feature 1920s speakeasy

Shades of the Twenties! Invitations are out for the Multiple Sclerosis Society's 1920 gala speakeasy Oct. 17 at the Rocky Mountain Club.

The benefit, sponsored by the Colorado Chapter of the National MS Society, has many people working on it. Committee chairman is **Warren Dean**; **Carol Corben** is the event coordinator with **Andrea Doray** doing public relations.

Michelle Noyes, in charge of decorations, will have life-size framed photographs depicting life in the '20s, as well as balloons, ribbons on black and pink tables, all of which ought to put one in the mood for a festive evening.

Guests will dance to **Tom Ross and the Tailgate Six** and later on, to the great sound of Dreams. The Gandy Dancers, a barbershop quartet, will be on hand too, with **Paul Huff, Phil McKeever, Wes Dorsey and Robin Morey** singing. They recently placed fourth at the Rocky Mountain District Competition in Salt Lake City. Entertainment chairman **Blake Wilson** is bringing all of this together.

A flashing searchlight will guide guests to the club as they walk past antique cars lining the street near the entrance to the Speakeasy. The dress code is evening gowns and black tie or costumes of the period. A buffet of seafood, beef, ham, chicken, hors d'oeuvres and wine and champagne will be served.

For the exciting grand prize of the evening, a week's trip to Mexico for two will be given to some lucky couple. Local MS director of development, **Theresa Briski**, has high hopes for raising $15,000, and with all that this gala has going for it, it ought to be a huge success.

Mary Carlone

Sun columnist

100th birthday

Ella Simms celebrated her 100th birthday this week at a family party given by her daughter, **Ruth Davis.**

A resident of Colorado Springs since 1957, Ella received many cards and good wishes. The happiest part of the day was being surrounded by her family, especially great-grandchildren, **Scotty, David and Betsy Peacock.**

Bright balloons saying "Happy Birthday" and an ice cream cake set the festive mood, but Ruth said there wasn't enough room on the cake to hold all 100 candles.

Chocolate festival

Are you a choco-holic? All of us falling into that category will want to go to the Embassy Suites Saturday to sample all manner of chocolate treats.

Called "Suite on Chocolate," this two-day gala celebrating chocolate is a benefit for the Colorado Opera Festival and can be attended with a $3.50 ticket purchased ahead of time or $4 at the door. The Festival office has tickets as does Howard Lorton's.

In addition to sampling, there will be cooking demonstrations, such as microwave chocolate brownies and chocolate truffles (one of my all-time favorites), and the Villa Restaurant of Palmer Lake will create different chocolate desserts.

Then, head for the Jazzercise area where you will learn how to work off all those calories you've just eaten. There will also be a silent auction, with exotic chocolate treats as prizes. This sounds like a chocolate lover's paradise.

Special to The Sun/Marilyn Heckel

Benefit-bound are Theresa Briski, Blake Wilson, Carol Corbin, Michelle Noyes and Warren Dean.

Fashion show

The Broadmoor is the setting again for the St. Paul's Women's Guild annual fall fashion show from Montaldo's. Tickets for the benefit are $15 for the luncheon and show which will be at noon Tuesday. Cocktails start at 11:15 a.m.

Mail your check to **Delores Freymuth**, 2713 Andromeda Drive. Delores, guild president, is co-chairing the show with **Bernadette Johnston** for the second year.

The show is geared to late fall and early holiday collections, and according to Montaldo's manager **Winfrede Gufler**, "This season is more exciting than ever and there is definitely something for everybody."

Four generations

Ella Simms celebrates her 100th birthday with her great granddaughter, Betsy Peacock, on her lap. Also pictured are granddaughter Janet Lewis, left, daughter Ruth Davis, standing, and granddaughter Ellen Peacock.

Military

Glenn S. Eldredge, son of **Mr. and Mrs. Edward Eldredge**, participated in Acceptance Day ceremonies at the U.S. Merchant Marine Academy in Kings Point, N.Y., as an Honor Plebe. Eldredge, along with 280 plebes, was administered the Academy oath and later sworn in as a U.S. Naval Reserve midshipman.

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Air Force Airman 1st Class **Thomas E. Guerrero**, son of **Mr. and Mrs. John Guerrero** of 6340 Lange Drive, has arived for duty in West Germany.

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Airman **Robert W. Smith**, son of **John W. Smith** of 2512 Garden Way and **Linda J. Oriley** of 2178 Shawnee Drive, has graduated from the U.S. Air Force medical material specialist course at Sheppard Air Force Base, Texas.

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Air Force Tech. Sgt. **Douglas G. Bork**, son of **R.G. and Marjorie S. Bork** of 6850 Gold Field Drive was deployed to Egypt to participate in exercise Bright Star 85.

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Airman **Richard E. Sellers**, son of **Mr. and Mrs. Richard H. Sellers** of 418 Dela Vista, Widefield, has graduated from the U.S. Air Force freight traffic specialist course at Sheppard Air Force Base, Texas.

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Education Notes

The annual Dean's Honor Roll and List of Distinction have been announced at the University of Northern Colorado for the 1984-85 academic year. The following local students are listed:

List of Distinction: Robert Baldwin, Jennifer Hammond, Carol Hill, Anne Muehlbauer, Thomas Noel, Sara Stocking, Scott Townsend, Carla Veghte, and Kim Jackson, all of Colorado Springs, and Robin Bean of Castle Rock.

Dean's Honor Roll: Margaret Emerson of Castle Rock, and from Colorado Springs, Deborah Cowan, Jeffery Davis, Joyce Hahn, Max Harvey, Jeffrey Hesselberg, Angela Hill, Brian Jerman, Susanna Kissmann, Mary Knudtsen, Jeanne Martinez.

Patricia Marx, Misti Middleton, Mark Nuccio, Jo Ann Ober, Phebe Paetsch, Lisa Qintana, Christopher Rather, Laura Rushing, Lisa Sanderson, Judith Tilkens, Jennifer Wyles, Heidi Yates.

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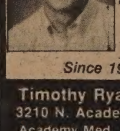

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